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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000383

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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TAGS: CU PGOV PHUM PINR PREL

SUBJECT: BRIGADE 2506 ATTRACTS LITTLE INTEREST AMONG CUBAN DISSIDENTS

Classified By: COM: James L. Williams: For reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) Summary: Brigade 2506, a Florida-based organization that includes many Bay of Pigs veterans, asked USINT to facilitate a video conference with two Cuban dissidents it selected by Brigade 2506, as well as a representative of FLAMUR (the Federation of Latin American Rural Women). Brigade 2506 initially told USINT that the appearances of Congressmen Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and Mario and Lincoln Diaz Balart were confirmed. In response, USINT sought to broaden participation on the Cuban end by inviting leading pro-democracy activists, including Laura Pollan, Guillermo Farinas, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez, Oscar Espinosa Chepe and Vladimiro Roca. All initially agreed, and then declined to participate when the day before the conference on May 9, Brigade 2506 acknowledged that the congressmen might not attend as part of a tightly-controlled agenda orchestrated by Brigade 2506 for the event. The exchange mainly consisted of the three Cuban participants readily agreeing to the assertions about the imminence of change made by the panel in Miami. End Summary.

¶2. (C) USINT, at the request of Brigade 2506, a Florida-based organization made up largely of Bay of Pigs veterans, facilitated a video conference with Cuban dissidents. Brigade 2506 requested the appearance of their representative in Cuba, Mario Ortega, as well as Lazaro Pietro Alvarez of the Commission for Political Prisoners and their Families. Ortega is little known to USINT and his local organization consists of seven members. Alvarez's organization is a small group within the many organizations that claim to provide assistance to political prisoners and their families. Brigade 2506's president, Segundo Miranda, also requested that a Cuban representative of the organization FLAMUR Cuba be present. USINT invited FLAMUR president, Belinda Salas Tapanes, to attend.

¶3. (C) Brigade 2506 had told USINT on April 9 that the participation of Congressmen Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and Mario and Lincoln Diaz Balart in the video-conference was confirmed. In an effort to broaden participation beyond the individuals hand-selected by Brigade 2506, USINT invited a diverse group of prominent opposition figures to participate. Initially, Vladimiro Roca; Jorge Luis Garcia Perez ("Antunez"); Laura Pollan, spokesperson for "Ladies in White"; Oscar Espinosa Chepe, opposition economist, and independent journalist Guillermo "Coco" Farinas all agreed to

participate. However, when Brigade 2506 sent on May 8 their own detailed and tightly choreographed agenda without mention of the Congressmen, all five declined to take part in the video-conference. Roca specifically said that the group in Miami seemed to want to present their program rather than learn about the current situation in Cuba.

¶4. (C) None of the Congressmen appeared for the video-conference on May 9, despite protestations from Brigade 2506 that the Diaz-Balart brothers still might show up. (Representative Ros-Lehtinen was busy meeting the President of Panama, a meeting that was likely on her schedule for weeks). Besides members of Brigade 2506 present in Miami were Laida Carro, of the Coalition of Cuban American Women, and Magdelivia Hidalgo, International Representative of FLAMUR. The three Cuban participants readily agreed to statements from the Miami side such as that the vast majority of Cubans want immediate systematic change, that the 1940 Cuban constitution has great relevance for democratic change, and that Estonia is a model of economic reform. Salas represented that FLAMUR's campaign to end the dual currency system was meeting with a lot of success. (Note: FLAMUR Cuba has been racked with internal strife, leadership battles and a lawsuit about the use of the organization's name. End Note).

¶5. (C) Midalgo did ask that more attention be made to the situation of Maria de los Angeles Borrego-Mir, Cuba's only female political prisoner. De los Angeles, after serving out the maximum four-year penalty for "dangerousness," was immediately charged with another four-year sentence, which she is currently serving in Manto-negro prison. The

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crime of "dangerousness" requires no proof beyond a police statement that a person is capable of anti-social acts.

¶6. (C) Comment: The most prominent Cuban dissidents with whom post deals on an almost daily basis have little interest in what they perceive to be one-way conversations that reinforce the views of Cuban-American organizations in the US. Leading Cuban opposition leaders, in contrast, see the situation as fluid and are constantly trying to adjust to the regime's evolving tactics. Also, Brigade 2506's apparent "bait and switch" tactic of first offering, then withdrawing, the participation of prominent congressmen from Florida gives the post pause about repeating this experience in the future.

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PARMLY